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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005501

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SUBJECT: PM ABUL RAGHEB VISITS DAMASCUS TO RAISE IRAQ,  
INFILTRATIONS, SUPPORT FOR MILITANTS

Classified By: CDA David M. Hale for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (S) PM Abul Ragheb delivered a message to Bashar al-Asad August 26 complaining of arms and explosives smuggling and a border incursion. Bashar professed readiness to resolve these issues, and to support the Iraqi Governing Council (GC). END SUMMARY

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ABUL RAGHEB ASKS BASHAR ABOUT IRAQ...  
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2. (S) Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb told the Charge and EconCouns August 28 that he had visited Damascus August 26 and spent an hour and fifteen minutes with President Bashar al-Asad. The PM said that Syrian PM Miro and the Jordanian Ambassador to Syria sat in on the meeting. Bashar told Abul Ragheb that there were "good people" in the Iraqi GC with whom he could work. Bashar was, at the same time, concerned about internal stability in Iraq, particularly by the possibility of Turkish intervention to end Kurdish/Turkoman tensions. He also expressed concern over smuggling of weapons and explosives from Iraq into Syria (he did not comment on illicit trade into Iraq, or movement of Iraqi regime figures). He said that an organized network of both Iraqis and Syrians appeared behind the smuggling. Syria's long border with Iraq, he complained, is very hard to police. Overall, Abul Ragheb said Bashar's views on Iraq had been "very positive and constructive."

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...BORDER ISSUES...  
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3. (S) Abul Ragheb said he had expressed to Bashar Jordanian concern over smuggling of guns (one thing, Abul Ragheb said), RPGs and explosives (quite another, the PM commented) from Syria into Jordan. The two agreed that Jordanian GID chief Saad Kheir would meet with Hassan Khalil, his Syrian counterpart, in the near future to continue discussions on the issue. Abul Ragheb complained to Bashar that Syrian forces continue to occupy 125 square kilometers of Jordanian territory (and that Jordanian forces occupy 3-4 square kilometers of Syrian territory). Abul Ragheb said that the issue is complicated, with nationals of the two states owning land across borders in the disputed parcels of land. He said that he had raised with Bashar the report of a 1992 commission that had been convened to find a solution to the claims and counter-claims, and suggested that the report be the basis for a permanent settlement.

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... AND CONTINUED SARG SUPPORT FOR MILITANTS  
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4. (S) Abul Ragheb said that he had also, at USG request, raised continued Syrian support for Palestinian militant groups and lack of Syrian support for the roadmap. He said he had told Bashar that Syria's attitude undercuts Jordanian support for the roadmap. Bashar, in response, said he had nothing against the roadmap, but was ready to negotiate with Israel only on the basis of land for peace and UNSCR 242. Bashar expressed rhetorical support for Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation, and argued that very little terrorist activity originated in or came through Syria, claiming Syria had no interest in promoting Palestinian Islamic groups. Abul Ragheb commented that "Baathis are good at analysis, but don't do anything."

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MIRO TO STAY ON AS PM?  
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5. (C) Asked about signs of a cabinet change in Syria, Abul Ragheb said he had heard that Miro might form a reshuffled cabinet. In any event, they agreed to hold a PM-led Syria-Jordan Binational Commission in November -- which Abul Ragheb took at least as a sign of short-term confidence by

Miro.

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COMMENT  
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16. (S) Abul Ragheb delivered a clear message to Bashar on several fronts, but was the first to acknowledge that Bashar was unlikely to change his behavior.

17. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.  
HALE